

June 4, 2021

Governor Roy Cooper
20301 Mail Services Center
Raleigh, NC 27699

VIA ELECTRONIC DELIVERY

Dear Governor Cooper,

Thank you for your leadership to drive action on climate change in North Carolina. We appreciate your initiative in issuing Executive Order 80 (EO80) and prioritizing climate change action in the state. We share your deep concern that climate change harms the people of North Carolina, especially its youth and generations to come. Now is the time to take bold, science-based, concrete actions to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions while creating good jobs and cleaner air for all North Carolinians.

The Southern Environmental Law Center (SELC) recently petitioned the Environmental Management Commission (EMC) to begin the rulemaking necessary for North Carolina to join the Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI). We strongly believe that the EMC should grant SELC's petition and initiate the rulemaking process. The EMC can then review the proposed rule, consider input from stakeholders, and eventually promulgate regulations to reduce North Carolina's greenhouse gas emissions in line with the best available science. We implore you to vocally support this petition so that the critical phase of rulemaking can begin.

We are three college students, born and raised in North Carolina, who have repeatedly called on the state to take action on climate change. Over the last seven years we have submitted three petitions asking the EMC to begin comprehensive rulemaking to reduce greenhouse gas pollution. All three petitions were rejected. Despite the bold vision articulated in EO80 and the Clean Energy Plan (CEP), the EMC has thus far failed to take necessary actions to achieve a clean economy and clean air. We look to you, Governor, to lead the EMC and the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to act with the urgency demanded by this moment.

Initiating the rulemaking process is a critical first step toward dramatically reducing North Carolina's emissions from the power sector—the first of a wide array of actions and policies that can set North Carolina on a path to fulfilling its moral and constitutional obligation to mitigate climate change. We know there is no “silver bullet,” no single policy that will undo past emissions or eliminate future ones. Joining RGGI is just one pathway and one step. It sets enforceable limits on greenhouse gas emissions from the power sector and could help spur a larger substantive conversation about decarbonizing all economic and energy sectors by mid-century, which the best available science shows is imperative. In this way, joining RGGI is the first chapter of North Carolina's climate change story. The rest of the narrative remains unwritten, but your leadership can shape it with stories of proactive climate action, a booming clean economy with good jobs, and a healthy living environment for all.

The risks of climate change are real, and North Carolina's people are already feeling the impacts. Rising seas are exacerbating coastal and inland flooding, and though the state has allocated over \$2 billion to sea level rise solutions, the seas will continue to rise if emissions are not reduced immediately. As temperatures continue to climb, the health impacts will become even more deadly in North Carolina. Hurricanes Matthew (2016), Florence (2018), and Dorian (2019) cost North Carolina and its people billions of dollars and induced incalculable psychological stress on affected communities, particularly those most vulnerable. These storms will only become more frequent and more severe. Climate change costs are being felt by all sectors, including tourism, human health, agriculture, forestry, water and coastal resources, property and infrastructure, energy consumption, and human capital. We and other young North Carolinians are disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of the climate crisis and will face life-long consequences. We demand action from our leaders.

Through EO80 and its mandate to combat climate change, you directed the North Carolina DEQ to produce the CEP. A new report commissioned by your administration found that joining RGGI could enable North Carolina to make substantial progress towards achieving the CEP goal of a 70% reduction in 2005 carbon dioxide emissions levels by 2030. SELC's proposed rule provides a framework that can meet those modest but necessary targets, and we believe that the EMC should initiate a rulemaking proceeding with input from relevant stakeholders, including North Carolina's youth and young adults.

Reducing emissions is not just about fighting climate change—it is also a smart investment in our economy. The new report found that investing RGGI auction revenues into energy efficiency could reduce residential, commercial, and industrial energy costs and create 90,000 job-years in North Carolina. The costs of joining RGGI are low compared to other climate policy options and could even be *negative*, meaning that the impacts would be net positive even without considering the co-benefits of public health improvements and a more livable climate.

We started our fight—for clean air and for our constitutional rights to a livable climate—in our early teens. As young adults, we continue to push for climate action. We are deeply concerned about the livability of our planet and determined that we and future generations are able to not just survive, but thrive, in North Carolina. In order to achieve this goal, we believe special attention must be given to communities that have been historically overburdened by environmental degradation and underserved by our state. We seek environmental justice for these communities that continue to bear the disproportionate impacts of climate change—impacts that increase in scale and magnitude with every day of inaction.

We ask our leaders to utilize the best available science to address the ever-present and ever-growing threat to our environment, safety and security, and livelihoods. We urge you as the Governor of North Carolina to use this moment as an opportunity. Please publicly support the SELC petition to join RGGI and encourage a full and robust rulemaking process.

Sincerely,

The image shows three handwritten signatures in black ink. From left to right, they are: Emily Liu, Arya Pontula, and Hallie Turner. The signatures are fluid and cursive.

Youth Petitioners Emily Liu, Arya Pontula, and Hallie Turner